

The Builder.

No. CCXLVI.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1847.



OCTOBER though it be, the day is warm and bright; what say you then, reader, to a Walk and a Talk? In spite of the dreadful doling in the city,—console lower than they have been for many a year, large commercial firms failing, confidence weakened, requisitions to prime minister for some immediate effort on the part of Government to avert difficulties,—building operations appear to be going on vigorously in the metropolis; and it may be well to stroll round to some of our new public buildings, and note the progress which has been made in them. Shall we take Palace-yard for our starting point, and see what has been done in the new Houses of Parliament since our lengthened examination in April? Visitors, taking off the attention of the workmen, are not desiderated here, but Mr. Barry knows our purpose, and lets no door be shut against us. We can't say this of all our professional friends, by the way; some few of whom are either so afraid that others should become as clever as themselves, or so thoroughly ashamed of their own works, that they dread examination, will afford no information, and yet are astonished if incorrect statements go forth. Open your doors, gentlemen, and let in the light, to shew you are not afraid of it.

In the words of the architect's midsummer report, "The carcass works of the portion of the building towards New Palace-yard are entirely completed. The Victoria Tower is about 90 feet high; the carving of the stone groin within it is completed, and the scaffolding is removed. The Clock Tower is also about 90 feet high. Framed scaffolding and hoisting apparatus have been prepared, and are now being fixed for the upper portions of those towers which are not yet contracted for. St. Stephen's Hall is in part carried up to its full height for the roof, and the remainder is, upon an average, within about 10 feet of the same level. St. Stephen's porch and the western entrance of the building is carried up to the height of about 30 feet above the ground."

St. Stephen's Porch and Hall, our readers will remember, form the entrance from Westminster Hall to the Central Hall of the new building, from which, north and south, extend the Peers' House and lobbies, and the Commons' House. Since the date of the above report, considerable progress has been made with the upper part of the Central Hall. The groined vault, 70 feet over (an immense work, spoken of in our former account), is nearly finished, and over it has been built a brick cone, to carry a spire, only recently determined on, if we understand rightly. This cone is three bricks thick, with buttresses, and will be faced with masonry.

Standing on the scaffolding here, it will be observed that the whole of the roofs are now nearly finished; those of the corridors north and south of the Central Hall, connecting it, as we have said, with the Houses, on either side, alone remain unfinished, and are now rapidly in progress towards completion. It is scarcely necessary to say, at this time, that

these roofs are wholly of iron, including the external covering.

A peep inside the House of Commons is not satisfactory. The ceiling, it is true, is finished, ready for the painters, and the stone screens at the north and south ends of the House are completed; but in other respects it is as it was long ago,—the walls are bare, and the floor, even that which is to carry it, not commenced. The explanation of this seems to be the old story,—no certain decision is yet come to respecting Dr. Reid's plans for warming and ventilating it, and if the architect were asked to state when the House will be ready for the members, he would probably reply it was quite out of his power to do so.

The Victoria Tower will be a grand thing when finished: the 90 feet which it has attained, out of the 346 to which it is to rise, afford enough to judge by. With the Clock Tower at the other end of the pile, and the spire on the Central Hall, it will entirely alter the character of the building externally, and remove the objection of want of variety of outline, which is now occasionally urged.

On a turret behind the Victoria Tower the model of a short spire, apparently for metal, is set up, terminated with a large crown and vane, the effect of which is unsatisfactory,—the vane is too large, and the outline not harmonious. Fortunately, it is but a model. The practice of essaying the appearance of the proposed decorative portions of a building when in their place, by means of models, is much more followed by the French architects than amongst us: it is greatly to be recommended. The working of mouldings and enrichments at their intended height, too, as done by our foreign neighbours (the stone being put up in blocks) has its advantages.

Let us cross the road, and see what is doing in Westminster Abbey, and in passing Henry the Seventh's Chapel, just observe the state of its new outside. In another twenty years it will be a ruin. The application of a chemical solution would probably do much to delay its destruction, and ought certainly to be tried.

In the Abbey the dean and chapter are going their own way, notwithstanding the tolerably loud dissent from it which has been expressed in all quarters. Nothing has yet been done in the transepts, but new carved stalls are being put up, down to and against the east side of the organ-screen, so as to get fifty, instead of thirty, as before. They seem to be nicely drawn and carved. The organ, which formerly surmounted the screen, is to be divided, and placed half on each side of it under one of the main arches. Additional room is to be gained, they say, for 800 persons, by the alterations in progress,—how many of them will see and hear what is going on is another question.

Westminster-bridge, whither we wend our way, presents a miserable aspect. Denuded of its parapets and alcoves, the masonry below left ruinous, and some of the arches, miserably distorted, shored up to prevent accidents, it must serve to astonish foreigners, who have heard so much of our superiority in this class of constructions, if in none other. Its rebuilding at present, nevertheless, seems unlikely.

We were amused recently by a "Copie of Reasons, presented by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, in 1664, against the proposal of building a new Bridge over the Thames, between Westminster and Lambeth, wherefrom further proceedings were stop'd." Amongst them were these,—that it might prove perilous to his majesty to have an near a

passage over the river for malefactor, in case of insurrection; it would divert trade from Southwark; lessen the revenue of London-bridge, and lead to its ruin; it would obstruct commerce, cause the river to flood adjoining lands, and "dampify and diminish the number of watermen." A concluding reason is sufficiently amusing and suggestive to be quoted entire:—

"The erecting of this Bridge would much advance the Increase of new Buildings in the Parts adjacent, which hath been carefully and continually provided against by Commissions, Proclamations, Decrees of Star-Chamber, Orders, and Instructions of the Council-Board, in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and his late Majesty (of ever blessed Memory) as well upon Rules of Law and Justice (as against publique Nuisances) and upon Reasons of State and Government, as from a particular Regard to the Honour, Government, Health, and Safety of the City of London (their Majesties Royal Chamber and Imperial Seat of the Kingdom) which they judged and declared to be of great Consequence to the Crown, and in much Danger by the Multiplicity and Increase of new Buildings, as the Cause and Means whereby the Citizens would be deprived of the Benefit of their ancient Privileges and Trades, and the Freedom of the City (which hath once been of great Esteem) will become of no Value, when Tradesmen in the Suburbs (which are since grown bigger than the City) may without Charge enjoye equall Benefit with the Freemen in London, their Markets being forestalled, and the prices of Timber, Fuell, Victual, and all other Provisions enhanced, their Conduit-Pipes built upon, stoppt and destroyed, the Streets become Nuisances to the City and Court, the Thames annoyed and choked by the Encrease of Sewers, and the Abundance of Soyle and Filth carried and washed into the River, to the Hindrance of Navigation, the City infested with great Numbers of idle, loose, and dissolute Persons resorting thither from all Parts of the Kingdom, to live by begging, cozening, Pilferys, Rapine, and other lewd, filthy, and unlawful Practices, and exposed to unspeakable Danger in case of popular Sicknes and Infection, and infinite other Detriments and Inconveniences which have since ensued, and do daylie grow (as the new Buildings have increased) upon the City."

The ignorance and prejudices of our ancestors are not much more striking to us than our own foolishness will appear in the next generation.

This quarter where increase of building was so much feared, and which is now of such importance, will soon be greatly changed by the extension of the South Western Railway on a viaduct. The enormous skew arch which will cross the Westminster-bridge Road, is being rapidly prepared for, indeed the abutments already appear above the foundations, and for one closely adjoining it, the piers are nearly completed. The viaduct will go on to Hungerford Bridge, near which there will be a station, and will form in the whole a great work. We will not divert our way to trace it back, or we should find some arches turned over roads in Lambeth worth examining. One over Paradise-street has ten iron girders, each 30 feet in length.

Our course must be westerly; we would see what progress they have made at Buckingham Palace. Our brief criticism on the addition now in course of erection, made when we, first, gave a view of the intended building,* has been adopted and amplified in every journal wherein mention was made of the structure,—*"It is little more than an ordinary piece of street architecture in stone instead of stucco."* The building has been carried up very rapidly, and has now reached its height, with the exception of the central portion. We regret to say that its effect is even less satisfactory than

* See p. 377, p. 380, p. 390, p. 394.

* Reprinted in Morning Advertiser.

* See p. 304, ante.